

Book Review

LES « SALLES À AUGES ». DES ÉDIFICES CONTROVERSÉS DE L'ANTIQUITÉ TARDIVE ENTRE AFRIQUE ET PROCHE-ORIENT

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This publication is the result of an international conference held on 29–30 May 2015 at the Colegio de España in Paris, titled 'Les salles à auges dans l'architecture de l'antiquité tardive, entre Afrique et Proche-Orient. Monuments pour les distributions publiques ou écuries?'. The two questioned interpretations are the core around which the discussion in this volume develops, and the duality of the topic is well expressed by the cover image, which juxtaposes the reconstruction of a North African hall for the collection and/or distribution of goods with that of a Syrian stable.

The Paris meeting aimed to reopen the debate on the so-called *monuments* or *salles à auges*, among which the Tunisian and Algerian examples of Haïdra (four in the city) and Tébessa stand out. They had already raised the interest of scholars since the late nineteenth century, but were more specifically examined by N. Duval (Duval 1976; 1977; 1979; 1985; Duval and Duval 1972; Duval and Golvin 1972), although regrettably his intention to dedicate a monograph to this topic has remained unfulfilled. These monuments range in date from the fourth to the sixth centuries AD and were built according to plans that generally include a vestibule and three naves separated by two rows of troughs, with the central nave often ending in an apse (F. Baratte *et al.*, 3, fig. 1). Added to this are entrances sometimes monumentalised with columns, with staircases indicating the existence of an upper floor (Baratte *et al.*, 5, fig. 4; J.-C. Golvin, 60, fig. 1).

Since then, other *salles à auges* have been recorded or excavated, forming a group as numerous as it is enigmatic, extending from Africa Proconsularis to eastern Libya, Egypt, Cyprus and the Near East. The group shows a wide range of variations not only in size and plan but also in the number and arrangement of the troughs, with chronologies falling in almost all cases within the Late Antique period. These rooms belong to both urban and extra-urban contexts and are located inside (sometimes fortified) buildings, which, in addition to their function as *salles à auges*, often combine residential or hostel functions, as well as religious functions as annexes to sanctuaries, churches and monasteries.

The examples from Haïdra, Tébessa and their respective territories, which were initially understood as churches transformed into stables or vice versa (Cagnat and Saladin 1887), have been subsequently interpreted as spaces where the exchange (distribution, collection, deposit, etc.) of agricultural goods or valuables took place through the troughs (Nestori 1980–82; Golvin and Séry-Metay 2009). However, eastern examples from northern Syria (G. Charpentier), southern Syria and northern Jordan (P. Piraud-Fournet) have gained relevance in the scholarship. In

these territories, a potential interpretation of the troughs as a feature related to the use of these buildings as stables is often not ruled out. It was therefore necessary to readdress the topic in light of new acquisitions over the last 50 years, in particular by providing a perspective that goes beyond the borders of North Africa, in order to obtain new information on the function of spaces where the trough element represents a defining feature.

Given the important role that North Africa plays in this discussion, the first two parts of the volume are entirely dedicated to it, but other contributions also address North Africa in the third and fourth parts. In this regard, one may observe that the organisation of the volume in five parts is not always easily understandable: various essays may easily fit into more than one part. On the other hand, a strength of the volume is the methodological choice of not excluding any research approach *a priori*, thoroughly exploring all the possible functions that have been attributed to the *monuments à auges* in past and recent scholarship. The editorial choice to engage with a broad discussion, also including buildings that may not be relevant to the topic, is exemplified by the 'monument à auges' of Althiburos (N. Kallala *et al.*), which, thanks to a more accurate examination of its structures and phases, can now be excluded from this group. The frequent cross-references within the volume are useful, thus providing unity to the treatment of the subject and offering a more in-depth discussion of case studies.

The first part begins with C. Vismara's overview of building categories related to economic functions. As for the *monuments à auges*, according to the author, the legitimacy itself of such a category could be called into question. Following Duval (2006, 142), she points out the existence of rooms with *auges* in a wide range of edifices and emphasises their possible use for storage, involving both civic and religious officials, private individuals, as well as *collegia*. The subsequent survey of literary and iconographic sources (A. Cristina) takes a different view, investigating the possibility that the troughs could be used as mangers or water troughs. Useful elements for the discussion are the dimensions and positioning that stables and barns had to have for the well-being of animals, as reported by ancient sources. But even more important is the analysis of circulation paths within buildings. North African mosaics do not seem to depict troughs in scenes of horse breeding connected to villas. However, this specific activity is known thanks to the Val d'Or stable at Oued Athmenia near Cirta, Algeria (on this building, see also P. Leveau, 132–34), which stands out from other cases of Late Antique Sicilian villas,

including that of Gerace, where spaces for horse breeding are only to be identified more or less plausibly through indirect evidence. The subject of stables is taken up again in the contribution by M. Spruyt, who rules out that the well-known *monuments à auges* of Haïdra and Tébessa could have served this function.

The same hypothesis is repeated throughout the review of Tunisian and Algerian case studies in the second part of the volume. The analysis of the Thelepte region (M. Hermassi) proposes a relationship between troughs and olive oil production activities. Especially significant is the evidence on *ostraka* attesting to economic transactions. According to J.-P. Laporte's study, the interpretation of the *auges* found in a series of buildings in the Tébessa region, dating to the Byzantine period, appears to be consistent with an economic purpose linked to olive tree cultivation. T. Ghali's interpretation of the aligned *auges* in the villas of Demna Wadi Arremel (Bouachir) and Sidi Ghrib (Borj el Amri) points to a similar agricultural context, although with a commercial rather than storage function.

The analysis by J.-C. Golvin turns out to be particularly relevant as it focuses on those structures that fall within the initial group of the *monuments à auges*. This follows previous research in which the author, along with N. Duval, analysed the building known as 'Haïdra 1' (Duval and Golvin 1972) and a smaller one called 'Haïdra 2' (Golvin and Séry-Metay 2009). The author hypothesises that these were fortified buildings used for transactions and safekeeping of valuables, including the possibility of a variable use of these spaces over time. These goods could be exchanged in two directions: from the public to an appointed officer, or vice versa. Exchange, in the first case, would involve the collection or voluntary deposit of valuables in a secure place, and in the second, distribution, payment or the return of previously deposited items. Military defence needs, which align with this interpretation, are considered the *raison d'être* of fortified houses with *auges* from the Byzantine period, as examined by F. Bejaoui and Z. Lecat in the territory of the Hautes Steppes, such as at Sbeitla. In this context, as in that of the Byzantine fortress of Timgad, the function of the *auges* could be connected to collective distributions of goods for the army.

J.-P. Laporte highlights that the presence of *auges* in a house at Ksar el-Kaoua (southwest of Chlef, Algeria), which are located in areas directly accessible from the outside and are separate from the living quarters, seems to suggest dynamics of exchange, such as the collection of agricultural rents or the distribution of goods. This introduces a central theme into the debate on the study of *auges* in domestic contexts, as enhanced by data from Cyrenaica. For this province, E. Jastrzębowska reviews a series of Late Antique residences, pointing out the arrangement of *auges* that do not seem to fit with a function as mangers (on these houses, see also Gasparini 2023). The presence of such installations in the elite residences of Cyrene and Ptolemais could indicate that they were intended to collect taxes in the form of coins or goods.

In the third part of the volume most of the contributions focus on *salles à auges* whose function is that of stables in domestic and commercial buildings. An extensive review covers the region of the mountains of Hauran, spanning both Syria and Jordan (P. Piraud-Fournet). The rooms with *auges*, dating from the second to the sixth centuries AD, are divided into eight well-illustrated types (Piraud-Fournet, 177, fig. 3). They occupy the ground floor of dwellings in both rural villages and towns, serving as indicators of the agricultural and pastoral prosperity of the area. Despite the different materials used to build the *auges*, it has been possible to recognise the spread of the same architectural type as far as the Negev Desert. Here, the presence of spaces for animals is linked to the production and export of wine. This activity constituted the most important economic resource of the

region between the fourth and seventh centuries AD, as highlighted in T. Erickson-Gini's contribution. The function of the *auges*, as inferred from the presence of holes for tethering animals, has been recognised also in pagan sanctuaries from the early imperial age and is in some cases demonstrated by the discovery of bovine and equine skeletal remains inside the halls (Piraud-Fournet, 183–85). Additionally, evidence from Iraq al-Emir in Jordan is compared with unpublished Egyptian data from Taposiris Magna, where a public building or perhaps a large Roman residence was equipped with an alignment of *auges*. One can certainly agree on the importance of this context despite the absence of a complete survey of Egyptian case studies. Indeed, Egypt would represent an obvious link between the series of North African *auges* and those that are documented in the East. However, the interpretation of the room in the building at Taposiris Magna as a space for animals remains to be demonstrated.

Through an examination of case studies from northern Syria, G. Charpentier does not rule out a function of those *auges* as mangers in domestic stables. Large residences dating to between the fourth and sixth centuries AD are taken into account, along with buildings provided with ground-floor spaces for the guests' horses, such as the hostel of Sergilla, where the monumentality of one of its flanks stands out thanks to the presence of two superimposed colonnades (Charpentier, figs 6 and 10). The results of these Syrian surveys contrast with the fact that, in North Africa, spaces designated to host animals remain less clearly defined. However, according to P. Leveau (131) some exceptions exist, which need to be isolated from the series of *monuments à auges* to 'montrer qu'il existe bel et bien en Afrique des «salles à auges» qui sont des écuries'. Among these, the author examines buildings (*mansiones, mutationes, tabernae, hospitia, stabula*, etc.) connected to the road network in the Hautes Steppes. These structures are possibly related to the *limes* and intended for military use. Another noteworthy example is the *centenarium* of Tibubuci near Kasr Tarcine on the *limes tripolitanus*, where the function of feeding or watering troughs has been confirmed by the analysis of organic remains in a room with *auges* along the walls (F. Baratte *et al.*, 13).

The hypothesis, already advanced in Golvin's discussion, of associating the troughs with the collection and distribution of donations is extensively explored in the fourth part of the volume. This broadens the analysis by including other territories and explores diverse architectural solutions that may have served the same function as the North African examples. While the unifying element in all these cases is the presence of troughs, they do not seem to appear in the Byzantine Esplanade of Caesarea Maritima presented by J. Patrich. Nevertheless, this contribution looks at the theme of *annona* distributions and the spaces that were reserved for these activities. These transactions involved officers distributing goods to citizens, but there are also various cases suggesting the opposite dynamic, with civic or religious buildings serving as places for collecting goods and valuables, although it is not always possible to confidently opt for one or the other hypothesis. In Cyrenaica, the purpose of collecting gifts from the sick seeking healing is recognised in the troughs at the Sanctuary of Asclepius in Balagrae, which was still active as a pagan 'établissement de cure' in the fifth and sixth centuries AD (E. Jastrzębowska, 217–19). A similar scenario might have occurred in the Christian context of the basilica of Campanopetra at Salamis, Cyprus (Jastrzębowska, 226–29). However, in the case of Cyprus, additional troughs located at the entrance to the Christian Complex of Kourion should be added to the record. A site of great relevance in this discussion is the Sanctuary of Saint Simeon in Syria. The extensive facilities serving the famous pilgrimage site included spaces for

accommodating pilgrims and their animals, which have been identified by J.-L. Biscop through the extant traces of elements for tethering animals. This is an example of *hospitia* in monastic buildings that had taken on the function of caravanserais or rest stations along infra-regional routes.

As emphasised by J.-P. Laporte (101), among the main gaps in the studies on the *salles à auges* is the limited knowledge of the artefacts found inside these buildings, which were often left unrecorded during past excavations. However, the two cases discussed below represent an exception. With regard to Saint Simeon, D. Pieri analyses some rooms along the *Via Sacra* leading to the *martyrion*. The richness of the materials found in these rooms (244–46, figs 13–17) points to a distribution of valuable items in a sort of shop probably managed by the monks themselves. The function of the *auges*, possibly used for collecting goods brought to the sanctuary as acts of charity by the faithful, remains to be defined. In this regard, F. Baratte's case study on the *Église d'Alexandre* at Bulla Regia is significant. The building, named after the dedicatory of a votive cross found inside it, is linked to the series of North African *monuments à auges* due to its double row of aligned troughs framing three naves and the presence of a quadrangular apse flanked by two rooms. In these latter rooms, the discovery of numerous containers dating to the fifth–sixth century AD and intended for food, along with other artefacts, shows that the building was intended for the storage of goods. Therefore, when they form part of a Christian complex, the troughs and the rooms in which they were placed attest to the importance in early Christian society of the themes of poverty and offering to the poor – a new form of euergetism to which specific spaces were allocated. This aligns with the arguments advanced by P. Brown (2003), who highlights the poverty-leadership dynamic in the Late Antique world, where the 'care of the poor' is understood as a way to fulfil a broader social duty.

Before the concluding remarks, the volume presents a fifth part under the title 'semiotic analysis'. It includes a single contribution by M. Hammad, which stands somewhat apart from all the other papers due to its markedly theoretical approach. The troughs, as well as the rooms containing them, are examined here by applying linguistic categories to spatial analysis.

In conclusion, the goal of the volume is not to offer a definitive answer to the question of the function of the *salles à auges*, but to provide an up-to-date analysis of the data, while leaving room for any future contributions that could develop new perspectives. Considering the presented results, a rich range of interpretations – sometimes only slightly different from one another – comes alongside the two traditional identifications of the *auges* (i.e. elements for collecting goods or mangers). The presence of oil-production facilities or villas with warehouses could suggest a focus on product conservation, while market centres have led to

hypotheses of goods exchange. The monumentality, and peculiarity, of some spaces have suggested, for a specific territory, the existence of venues for transactions with the local officials, which is further confirmed in other cases by the presence of troughs in animal-inaccessible spaces within elite residences. When dealing with Christian contexts, the role of the church in collecting and distributing goods to the population comes into play. However, pilgrimage sites were provided with spaces for the pilgrims' animals as well as with facilities for depositing votive offerings and souvenirs. When the context has allowed it, the research has identified stables within houses, farms, hostels and monasteries. The predominance of such evidence in the eastern Empire may seem entirely random, but the same may not be true for the canonical *monuments à auges* of Africa Proconsularis. Indeed, their distinctive architectural forms could constitute a regional response, which differed from those adopted elsewhere, to fulfil a public-administrative function.

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